

Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr. today responded to recent press reports that detail President Bush's use of racial disparities in life expectancy to justify abolishing the current Social Security system.

"Rather than cynically using race statistics to gain support for privatizing Social Security, President Bush should spend his time addressing the causes behind the difference in life expectancies. When President Bush claims that because African-Americans have a shorter life expectancy than whites, they get a raw deal from Social Security, he is flat-out wrong. Why is it that every time President Bush appears to be reaching out to the black community, he has something up his sleeve?" Jackson said.

"It's true that African-Americans have a shorter life span than whites. This is a difference that needs to be addressed, but it does not mean that blacks are given short shrift by Social Security.

"Social and economic disparities are the primary causes of the difference in life expectancy between African-Americans and whites. The current Social Security system attempts to narrow such disparities by providing a greater benefit to retirees who have earned less during their lifetimes. Furthermore, survivor benefits have been crucial to the families of Social Security beneficiaries after they die, preventing thousands from falling into abject poverty. Both of these mechanisms have been especially important for the African-American community.

"Mr. Bush ought to think about continuing the commitment to making economic security possible for all Americans, not trying to justify a system that will leave more people behind. Chicago's seniors deserve better than the distortions that President Bush consistently uses to promote his policies," Jackson concluded.

According to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, African-Americans who live to the age of 65 and become eligible to collect Social Security benefits live an average of an additional 16.6 years, compared to the 18.2-year average term for whites.

The latest Census figures show that nearly 300,000 Chicagoans are 65 years of age or older,

and stand to see their Social Security benefits cut under President Bush's proposal.